"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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A Community Organization Program for Small Communities

By Dan R. Davis*

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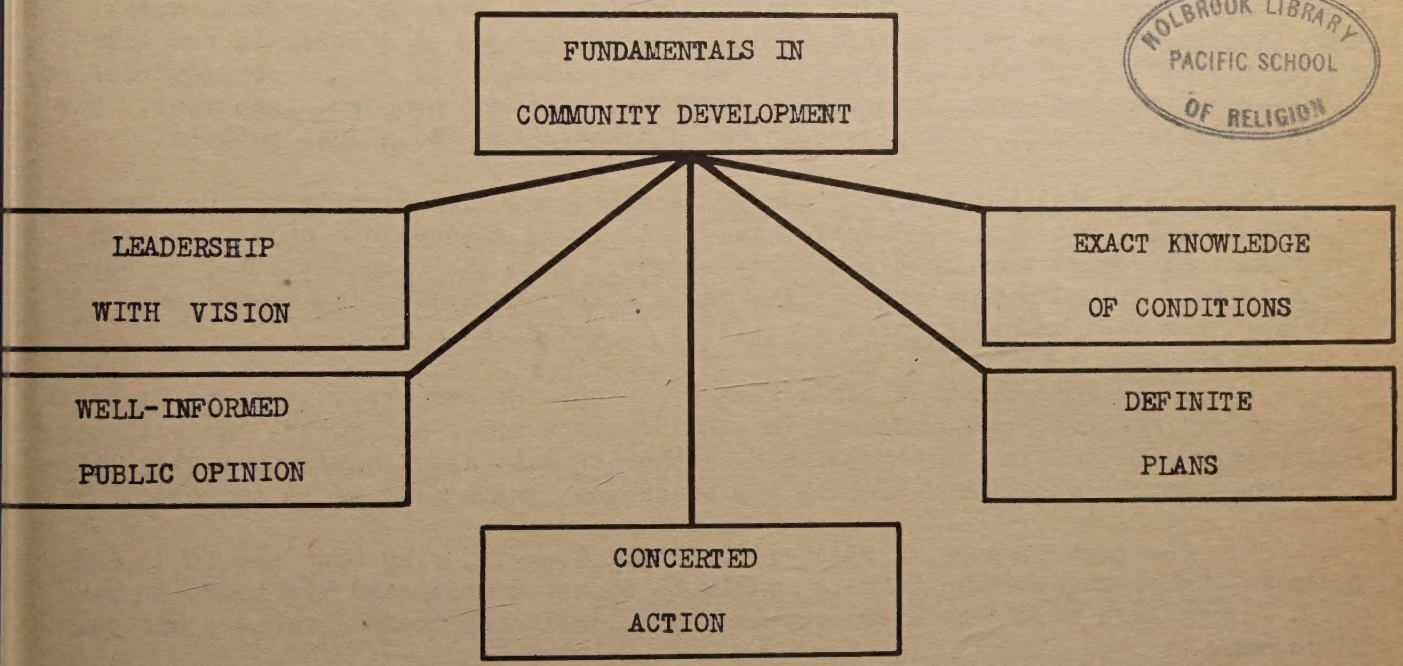

Too frequently the community is the neglected orphan in American life. A reasonable portion of the responsibility for this neglect can be charged to the so-called professional educator who, in striving for the solution of state, national and world problems, has turned his back on the problems near at hand.

Dr. O. E. Baker, former senior agricultural economist for the United States Department of Agriculture, has pointed out that cities in the United States of more than 100,000 people do not maintain a stationary population but look to rural areas for replacement and additions. If this is true, a great social responsibility is placed upon small communities. They must rear and educate youth

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not only to maintain rural life, but also export many youth to maintain city populations.

How may the small community homes and schools be strengthened in order to produce more adequate people locally and for the nation as a whole? A great deal can be accomplished through the creation of an active organization to study and meet local community problems.

Who may sponsor or project a program for community organization? The answer is that a community may make the start. Initiative may be taken by the county agent, vocational agriculture and homemaking teacher, minister, land-use planning committee, home demonstration agent, merchant, banker, and other community leaders may begin such a program.

A complete understanding of the social and economic conditions of the community and its trade territory should precede any plan of action. A careful survey will reveal the distinctive characteristics and needs of a certain area. Each locality must be studied separately. The prevalence of maleria in one community may be its foremost problem, whereas the economic and social consequences of a one-crop system of agriculture may present the greatest problem of another. The task is similar to that of a physician who diagnosis the individual patient.

The social and economic survey is often made incorrectly through the use of stereotyped questions. To avoid this, local group discussions should precede the technical formulation of a community survey. When the people themselves begin thinking as a group, a more appropriate and distinctive survey can be planned. In this way also the community gains experience in acting as a group.

It is important, in conducting a survey, for many volunteers to participate--church members, lodge members, merchants, farm women and youth. General community participation in the procedure of gathering data about their community causes the people to see first hand some of the conditions which need to be improved.

The next step is to elect a Community Council. The body should be composed of the representative leaders available in a community and its trade territory. Great care should be exercised in the selection of council members and committeemen.

Each council member might well serve as the chairman of one committee. Here is an illustrative breakdown of committees:

Committee on Economic Improvement
Committee on Recreation Improvement
Committee on Health and Mental Health Improvement
Committee on Schools and Education
Committee on Community Social Welfare
Committee on Churches
Committee on Local Government
Committee on Research

The purpose of each committee is to develop those community assets and correct those weaknesses revealed by the findings of the community survey. The general council should determine in what order of priority the problems should be attacked.

By way of illustration, the Committee on Economic Improvement may be concerned with:

Improving economic relations between town and country
Diversifying crops and soil conservation
Developing natural resources
Promoting a trades day for merchants
Improving roads
Establishing a "farmer's market" in town
Fostering specialized industry
Promoting a bull circle
Developing rural electrification
Organizing a community fair
Conserving wildlife
Advancing reforestation
Establishing a cold storage locker plant
Inaugurating auction sales of livestock
Organizing co-op marketing and buying
Safeguarding the rights of tenants
Aiding poultry raising, orcharding, dairying, gardening
Establishing a community cannery or potato-curing plant
Advancing cooperative veterinary service
Promoting cooperative fire insurance
Maintaining cooperation with county agent and home demonstration agent

The Committee on Recreation Improvement may be concerned with:

Promoting a community recreation program
Sponsoring Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations
Developing a dramatic club, folk dancing activities, group singing
Promoting community barbecues, picnics
Arranging for holiday observance
Organizing hobby and handicraft clubs

The Committee on Health Improvement may be concerned with:

Securing a resident physician for the community
Supplying sanitary water supply and sewage disposal
Sponsoring adult education on diet
Securing a community nurse
Emphasizing proper care of milk and foods
Stressing the evils of patent medicines
Providing physical examinations for adults and youth
Cooperating with state health department and county health unit
Training classes for mid-wives
Training in pre-natal and post-natal care for mothers
Sponsoring health lectures by physicians
Preventing malaria, typhoid, pellegra
Promoting cooperative hospitalization and medical care

The Committee on Schools and Education may be concerned with:

Sponsoring an educational program for adults
Improving school attendance
Encouraging the use of the school library by adults
Hiring a vocational agriculture or homemaking teacher
Promoting panel discussions, forums, debates, study clubs
Consolidating school districts
Increasing the tax rate for school purposes
Improving school buildings and equipment
Organizing a P.T.A.
Obtaining well trained teachers, improving teacher tenure
Maintaining academic freedom

The Committee on Home Improvement may be concerned with:

Sponsoring a community clean-up week
Promoting farm and home ownership
Creating incentives for home conveniences
Advancing interest in the F.H.A. program
Encouraging interest in landscaping homes
Stressing home upkeep
Promoting a flower exchange day

The Committee on Social Welfare may be concerned with:

Improving social relations between county and town people
Providing aid to sick and crippled
Cooperating with state and federal social welfare agencies
Improving race relations
Informing citizens of provisions of the G.I. Bill of Rights
Disseminating information on the proposed extension of the Social Security Act
Assisting group organization in re-employment and adjustment of veterans
Studying child welfare and juvenile delinquency
Directing aid for orphans, destitute, parolee, widows, insane
Studying problems of youth

The Committee on Churches may be concerned with:

Unifying and integrating the concerted strength of all local churches in meeting the needs of the community in harmony with the community council
Promoting interest in maintaining care of the community cemetery
Conducting religious educational activities: week day or vacation periods
Forming a religious work council on a community basis
Interpreting principles of the "good life" in terms of the community situation
Conducting church preference surveys
Encouraging church attendance
Helping to maintain moral standards and law enforcement
Supporting worthy community projects

The Committee on Local Government may be concerned with:

Arousing interest in local government
Promoting efficiency in local government
Insuring law enforcement
Increasing economy in local government
Directing taxation, assessment values
Limiting tax levies
Eliminating illegal institution and practices
Relating of local government to county, state and federal government

The Committee on Research may be concerned with:

Conducting timely surveys
Sampling local opinion of people on current community problems
Advancing general publicity
Integrating community activities with state and federal activities
Furnishing information to the local public on liabilities and assets of the community

The democratic processes for developing a "well-rounded" community program becomes effective in proportion to the degree of the leadership, education and organization of the citizenry of a community. The greatest single handicap in organizing the small community is not a scarcity of leadership, but rather lack of vision of what the community might be--"where there is no vision, the people perish."

A FEW SUGGESTED READINGS

Books

Colcord, J. C., Your Community: Its Provision for Health, Education, Safety, Welfare, New York: Russell Sage Foundation

Sanderson, E. D., The Rural Community, Boston: Ginn and Company

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Steiner, J. F., Community Organization, New York: The Century Company, 1925

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Sims, N. L., Elements of Rural Sociology, New York, T. Y. Crowell Company

Cole and Crowe, Recent Trends in Rural Planning, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Kolb and Brunner, A Study of Rural Society, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company

Sanderson, E. D., Leadership for Rural Life, New York: Association Press

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Making Community Surveys, Agricultural Extension Service University Farm, Pamphlet No. 73, St. Paul, Minnesota

A Planned Recreation Program for 4-H Clubs, USDA Extension Service Circular 338; Washington, D. C.

Handbook for Recreation Leaders, United States Department of Labor, Children's Bureau Publication 231, Washington, D. C.

Rural Library Service, USDA Farmer's Bulletin No. 1847, Washington, D. C.

Still Sits the Schoolhouse by the Road, The Committee on Rural Education, 5835 Kimbar Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

The School and the Changing Pattern of Country Life, Southern Rural Life Conference, George Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee

A Rural Challenge to the Protestant Church - Dan R. Davis, The Christian Rural Fellowship, Bulletin No. 51, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.

Report on Economic Conditions of the South, National Emergency Council, Washington,D.C

*Additional free bulletins may be obtained from:

Texas Department of Health, Austin, Texas; The Hogg Foundation, Austin, Texas; The Agricultural Extension Service, College Station, Texas; The Agricultural Experiment Station, College Station, Texas; United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.; United States Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, Washington, D. C.; American Library Association, Chicago, Illinois; Farm Foundation, Chicago, Illinois; National Recreation Association, 315 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

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